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# MONTAIGNE

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# MONTAIGNE

A STUDY

BY

R. WARWICK BOND

Τοῦτο γὰρ τῷ ὄντι μέγα, οὗ πολλὴ μὲν ἡ ἀναθεώρησις, δύσκολος δὲ μᾶλλον δ' ἀδύνατος ἡ κατεξανάστασις, ἰσχυρὰ δὲ ἡ μνήμη καὶ δυσεξάλειπτος.

Περὶ Ὕψους, vii. 3.

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# ALBERT G. FEUILLERAT

VRAIMENT TRAVAILLEUR, PROFESSEUR NI PÉDANT NI FAT,
CONFRÈRE AUSSI AIMABLE QUE DÉSIRÉ DE MES ÉTUDES ANGLAISES,
ET SURTOUT DE LA TÂCHE DE RENDRE JUSTICE
À UN VIEIL AUTEUR TROP PEU CONNU,
JE DÉDIE
AVEC DES SENTIMENTS LES PLUS VIFS D'AFFECTION ET DE RESPECT
CETTE PETITE ESQUISSE D'UN GRAND FRANÇAIS
DEPUIS LONGTEMPS ET POUR JAMAIS
COURONNÉ.

le 5 mai 1906.

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# I

# MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Montaigne is one of those perennial sources of mental health to which there needs no excuse for returning. He is always necessary and always being rediscovered. Perhaps his grand sincerity, fullness, and truth of matter, his absolute freedom from affectation of manner, are of special cathartic value for an age in which these qualities are not conspicuous. Perhaps Montaigne with his hatred for the lie, his detestation of show and sham, his fearless frankness, might help us to a quicker instinct for honesty, a readier detection of the vulpine and the vain. Even if we must echo with a sigh his own doubt whether true opinions are always the most convenient for man, yet never was it well with him who consciously withheld his worship from that altar—few are they who will not profit by sharing Montaigne's noble passion for the truth.

Our present knowledge of his life is a structure to which many have lent their hand, though the French research of the past half-century has still to acknowledge the *Essais* as its chief quarry. The total results may be gleaned from the careful pages of M. Bonnefon[1], for which the English reader may substitute the thoughtful chapters of Mr. M. E. Lowndes[2]. The briefest summary of facts is perhaps desirable.

*Leading facts of his life*, 1533–1592.

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was born between eleven o'clock and noon on February 28, 1533[3], at the château of Montaigne situated some kilomètres from the right bank of the Dordogne in the department of that name, but on the border of

[1] *Montaigne: L'Homme et l'Œuvre*, 1893, re-issued with some additions as *Montaigne et ses Amis* par Paul Bonnefon, 1898 (2 vols.—Armand Colin).

[2] *Michel de Montaigne: A Biographical Study* by M. E. Lowndes (Pitt Press, 1898).

[3] I. xix. p. 53. References throughout are to Book and Essay, with particular page of J. V. Leclerc's annotated edition of 1826 as re-issued in two vols. by Garnier Frères. English translations here are usually from Florio, whose version, however occasionally inaccurate, is admirably vigorous and best preserves the antique flavour of the original.

the Gironde, and about thirty miles to the east of Bordeaux. The family-name was Eyquem or Ayquem, a name, says the Essayist, connected with one well known in England[1]; while the territorial designation recalls the hillock on which the house is perched[2]. The Eyquem who bought Montaigne was the Essayist's great-grandfather, Raimond, dealer in wine and dried fish in Bordeaux, a calling followed also by his grandfather, Grimond, and, so far as his own wine grown at Montaigne was concerned, by Pierre his father. Pierre, however, was much more than a simple tradesman. In early manhood he followed the Italian wars; and when at thirty-three he married Antoinette de Louppes[3] and settled at his château, he seems to have made it his object to acquire a certain degree of culture. The Essayist, who was probably their third child, though the eldest who grew up, tells

[1] II. xvi. p. 22. 'Eyqu m, surnom qui touche encores une maison cogneue en Angleterre': Florio adds as the English equivalent, 'Higham.'

[2] III. iii. p. 212. 'Ma maison est juchée sur un tertre, comme dict son nom.'

[3] Bonnefon, i. 11, 17, 22.

us his father had caught something of the enthusiasm for letters that animated Francis I, and, whatever his original lack of knowledge, courted the acquaintance and the visits of learned men[1]. He knew Italian and Spanish well, and read and quoted Spanish authors[2]. Montaigne constantly speaks of his father in terms of the warmest gratitude and affection: he was 'the best and most indulgent that ever was'[3]; and the essay on the Education of Children (I. xxv) testifies to his care to remedy in his son's case the defects he recognized in himself. Strains of music dissipated each morning the light slumbers of the infant Montaigne, lest the brain should receive injury from too rude an awakening. Before the child could speak, a German wholly ignorant of French, but an excellent Latinist, was engaged with two attendants to be continually with him, so that the learned authors might present no difficulty to one to whom Latin was his mother-tongue—literally so, for father,

[1] II. xii. p. 402.

[2] II. ii. p. 315. His wife was of Spanish extraction; the name was originally Lopez: Bonnefon, i. 16.

[3] I. xxvii. p. 150.

mother and all the household-servants learned Latin enough to talk to the boy, who, until he went at six to the Collège de Guienne at Bordeaux, spoke no word of French or Perigordin. At the college he remained, under Grouchy, Guerente, George Buchanan and Muret, from 1539 to 1546; losing by contact with those of less perfect knowledge the purity of his Latin, but mastering easily, as his favourite books for private reading, Ovid, Virgil, Terence and Plautus, to which he added the Italian comedies. After thirteen he is supposed still to have attended courses on rhetoric and dialectic; and later to have studied law in the University of Toulouse[1]. In 1554 his father had bought for himself, as was then customary, the post of magistrate in the new Cour des Aides at Périgueux; but his appointment as mayor of Bordeaux in the same year left the post vacant for his son[2]. Montaigne, like Ariosto before him and William Drummond after him, applied himself perhaps without much energy to legal duties for which he had but small faculty. He is eloquent

[1] Lowndes, p. 47. [2] *Ib.* p. 61.

in the Essays on the hopeless intricacy and inconsistency of French law[1]. In 1557 the Périgueux Court was transferred to Bordeaux, where commenced his famous friendship with La Boëtie, terminated only by the latter's death in 1563. In 1559 he was sent by the Bordeaux Court on some mission to Francis II[2]—apparently not his first visit to Paris, a city for which he professes the fondest attachment[3]. In 1565 he married Françoise de La Chassaigne, daughter of a fellow magistrate[4]. In 1568, on his father's death, he succeeded to the estate[5]: in 1570 he retired from the Bordeaux magistracy[6]. The autumn of that year was spent in Paris in superintending the publication of La Boëtie's poems and translations; and a formal inscription in his library, dated February 28, 1571, marks the definite commencement of nine years of literary leisure at Montaigne. Between 1570 and 1577 five daughters were born

[1] III. xiii. pp. 456-60, 463-4.
[2] Bonnefon, i. 63.
[3] 'Elle a mon cœur dez mon enfance,' III. ix. p. 360.
[4] Bonnefon, i. 86.
[5] *Ib.* i. 89-91.
[6] *Ib.* i. 96.

to him, of whom only Léonore grew up[1]: and from 1571 to 1579 he was occupied in the composition of the first two Books of the *Essais*, which were licensed on May 9, 1579, and published by Simon Millanges at Bordeaux the next year, the address of the author to the reader bearing date 'premier de mars 1580'[2]. On June 22, released from literary labour, he set out on a prolonged tour; repairing first to Paris, where he is said to have presented his book to Henri III, assisting at the obsequies of his friend the Comte de Grammont, just killed at the siege of La Fère[3], and starting in September on his travels through Switzerland, Germany and Italy—travels which are illustrated by the *Journal de Voyage* kept conjointly by his secretary and himself, and were interrupted (September 7, 1581) at Lucca, where he gave a dance, by the news of his election as mayor of Bordeaux. His first inclination was to decline the honour; and he travelled back to Rome, where he had previously spent four and a half months: but

[1] Bonnefon, i. 271. [2] *Ib.* ii. 2.
[3] *Ib.* ii. 6; and *Essais*, III. iv. p. 222.

a sense of duty, rather than ambition, triumphed, and he decided to return. Reaching Montaigne on November 30, he found a letter from the King commanding his acceptance; and he obeyed. On August 1, 1583, his office was renewed for a second term of two years, so that his duties did not terminate till the end of July, 1585, some two months after a great outbreak of the Plague. The civil war, which had raged intermittently since 1562, had broken out a third time at the beginning of the year: and his château was pillaged, but not destroyed. At the end of 1585 he was able to resume his life of study there. He revised the first two Books of the *Essais* and added a third, the three being published together at Paris in 1588. It was on the journey thither, in February[1], that the incident occurred which he narrates with some complacency in the twelfth essay of the Third Book. He fell into the hands of a troop of marauders who, in spite of the fact that a truce existed at the time, robbed and stripped him, but were ultimately induced by his

[1] Bonnefon, ii. 152.

firm demeanour to restore to him both his property and liberty. In Paris, in July, he was arrested and sent to the Bastille by the League, who had driven Henri III from the capital; but was released owing to the special intervention of the queen-mother, Catherine[1]. Earlier in the year he had made the acquaintance of Mlle de Gournay: at Blois in the autumn he met De Thou and Pasquier. The remainder of his life was passed quietly at Montaigne. His trying illness of the stone, which began in 1578[2], and which his long tour was partly intended to remedy, was alleviated by the tokens of a universal respect; and during this period he made large additions to his work, embodied in the posthumous edition of 1595. On January 18, 1590, he wrote to Henri IV, with whom he had long been on excellent terms, to congratulate him on the gradual and sure establishment of his authority; and on September 2 he wrote again excusing himself from accepting his

[1] See the letter first published by Dr. Payen, 1855, quoted Bonnefon, ii. 154–5.

[2] II. xxxvii. p. 144 it is eighteen months or so since his first attack.

special invitation to Court. The same year saw his daughter married. He died of a quinsy on September 13, 1592.

*An unfavourable estimate*

It would be possible to take a very unfavourable view of the character of Montaigne, one perhaps actually taken before the publication of the *Essais*. Great authorship and great character are far from identical; though, when once the great authorship is established, we can sometimes correct our perspective and perceive that the acts and abstentions which contributed to that result were themselves a part of greatness. The writing often proves at least the intellectual apprehension and choice of goodness; and in its light we resurvey the life. But it takes time. 'Fame's trumpet,' as Swift reminds us, 'sounds best and farthest when she stands on a tomb, by the advantage of a rising ground and the echo of a hollow vault[1].' Even with the *Essais* before him, but their merit as yet unacknowledged, the Philistine, passing shallow hasty sentence, might quite plausibly have repre-

[1] *Tale of a Tub*, Sec. viii.

sented their author as a slow dull fellow, spoilt by indulgence as a boy, too lazy to work at school, too obstinate and conceited to profit in the larger school of life; of lax sexual morality; a thriftless and indolent manager of his property; discourteous to his fellow men; a despiser of women; alike devoid of public spirit and insensible to the sweet influences of home; a selfish recluse, who occupied himself in pouring out a flood of unabashed and formless chatter about his wretched incapable self, while depreciating his contemporaries and heaping scorn on humanity in general. Something of this kind might easily have been said: there was apparent ground for it, and Montaigne was the last man in the world to draw attention to what might contradict it. And now, when the full result is won, and the approving judgement of the few is reinforced by the united bray of Ashkelon and Gath, we are apt to err as much, perhaps, in the other direction, and to see all as loftiness and worth. We are miserably the slaves of the victorious result. Because Shakespeare wrote *Lear* and is the world's poet, we quote

as fragments of immortal wisdom the wretchedest doggrel with which he tagged his scenes: because Raphael has composition, purity and dramatic vigour, he may be conventional at pleasure and draw as badly as he likes: because Schubert wrote a magnificent *Erl-König*, a fine *Ave Maria*, we are plagued by our masters of music with shoals of soulless, joyless exercises he dared to sign as Songs: a man of Cabinet rank cannot write a dull biography: 'an accepted wit,' remarks Mr. Gilbert, 'has but to say "Pass the mustard", and they roar their ribs out!' In this irrational desert and dearth of distinction, let us try to justify our acquittal of Montaigne.

*would have to rely on his own statements.*

In the first place the indictment would have to rely chiefly on the *Essais* themselves. As he perceives 'quand tout est compté, on ne parle jamais de soy, sans perte: les propres condamnations sont tousjours accrues; les louanges, mescrues[1]'. At least we may set against the faults of which he tells us the obvious merit of honesty; and reflect

[1] III. viii. p. 308.

that such confession, not emanating from one palpably reckless, implies a conscience tolerably at ease. Nor is it a peace attained by any self-deceit, nor yet by a ravage that has left the country a desert. In the soul of Montaigne was ever the comforting conviction of the presence and benignant fatherhood of God, which he never dreamed of questioning.

*Friendship with La Boëtie.*

Next we may point to the fact that this poor egoist, sensualist, and selfish domestic tyrant, was able to inspire an almost romantic affection in one of the gravest and most elevated characters of his time; and, what is more, to return it. An intimate knowledge, a wide charity, an honourable sentiment to both men was that which enabled the dying La Boëtie to beg his friend not to lay upon his restless nature the task of sitting constantly by his sickbed, yet to visit him as often as he could; and the impatient one to feel that here, in an office painful to himself and perhaps of but slight alleviation to the sufferer, was the proper call for self-restraint, and

to record 'Je ne l'abandonnay plus'[1]. The vigil was but brief. He inherited his friend's library, and elaborately edited his few small works—translations of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and Plutarch's *Marriage Precepts* and *Consolation to his wife*, some Latin verse, and two small collections of French sonnets. He does not speak extravagantly of them, save perhaps of the sonnets[2]. Rather he feels that they ill represent his friend's powers. 'The true sap and marrow of his worth,' he says, 'is gone with himself; he has left us only the bark and the leaves[3].' Elsewhere[4] he states his belief that his legal powers were greater than any other's

[1] Letter i. p. 515.

[2] Critical opinion north of the Loire, perhaps that of Baif, had at first made him hesitate about publishing these. They had been pronounced 'pas assez limez pour estre mis en lumière', and Montaigne had a high respect for the Pléiade and their authority (*Essais*, I. xxv. p. 137, II. xvii. p. 56). Nevertheless partiality triumphed. They appeared in 1571 (a copy in the British Museum is dated 'M.D. LXXII'), and in the dedication to De Foix Montaigne pronounces them 'pour le subject, autant charnus, pleins et moëlleux, qu'il s'en soit encores veu en nostre langue'.

[3] Letter v. p. 531.

[4] Letter iii. p. 527.

of his profession in Guienne; while in the essay 'De la Presumption' he praises him as the one complete man of his acquaintance, 'un' ame à la vieille marque, et qui eust produict de grands effects si sa fortune l'eust voulu[1].' We are irresistibly reminded of the relation between Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, lasting from 1828, when Tennyson went up to Trinity, till Hallam's sudden death at Vienna (September 15, 1833) in his twenty-third year. Hallam was some two years Tennyson's junior, La Boëtie some two and a half years Montaigne's senior; and the earlier friendship began some five years later in life: but its duration was very nearly the same—six years against the five years of the later pair, it was terminated in the same sudden and tragic fashion, and it left traces as marked and permanent. Each survivor had regarded his friend as a being above himself, and essayed to build his literary monument. In both cases we, judging by the early fruit left behind, are inclined to think that friend-

*Cf. Tennyson and Hallam.*

[1] II. xvii. p. 54. Cf. Sainte Beuve, *Lundis*, ix. 140-61.

ship has been partial. We can admit no evidence save that of actual achievement, for of whom can it be said that he did all he might have done? 'Of your strength,' says Carlyle, 'there is and can be no clear feeling save by what you have prospered in, by what you have done. Between vague wavering capability and fixed indubitable performance, what a difference![1]' A mother, sister, wife, brother, friend, may feel how inadequate is the world's recognition of the faculties and graces in which they take delight; but we others, outside the circle, we are fain to take life's slashing sweepstake as it comes. We can make no allowance for the slip before the big water-jump, the swerve at the flag-corner, the bit of unfair jockeying that may have wrecked the favourite's chances. Men shrug their shoulders at such; they cannot thus discount the rubs to which all are liable: and so life continues to present its disappointments and surprises, and the sweet ministrations of love remain uncheapened by extension. And sometimes the weighty consequence of promise thus cut

[1] *Sartor Resartus*, ii. 7.

short forces upon us the thought of other purpose at work in the world than our own. The death of Hallam results in *In Memoriam*: the death of La Boëtie inaugurates the literary labours and swells the library of Montaigne. Doubtless, too, his monitions and example had formed a salutary check on one whose youth we must admit to have somewhat lacked moral ballast. To that famous friendship we must needs, I think, assign something of the credit of the *Essais*.

*Relations with women:*

We can hardly found any vindication of equal strength on his relations with women. The only essays specially dedicated are addressed to ladies; and to these, to Diane de Foix (I. xxv) and the Comtesse de Grammont (I. xxviii), to Madame d'Estissac (II. viii) and Madame de Duras (II. xxxvii), as also to Marguerite of Navarre to whom his longest effort, the *Apologie*, seems to be addressed[1], his tone is the appropriate one of respectful courtesy. Elsewhere, he professes a strong taste for 'the company of faire and honest women',

[1] II. xii. pp. 525-6.

who enslaved him, he says, too easily in his youth[1]: and from the improper essay, 'Sur des Vers de Virgile,'[2] we should certainly infer that he had had what are called *bonnes fortunes*. Yet I much doubt if he was really a favourite with them. In spite of a cheerful social temper he acknowledges some constraint in society[3]; and tells us that, as a young man, even when at games in ladies' company, he was apt to lose himself in speculations upon death[4]. Two other marked characteristics would be equally fatal to him; the first, his dislike of ceremony, his bluntness of address; the second, his lack of readiness, and of confidence in his own powers. These are not qualities which commend themselves to women, and it is perhaps to a sense that they always underrated him that his generally unfavourable estimate of them is due.

*probably not a favourite:*

A striking exception occurs in the quasi filial and paternal relation between him and the clever girl of twenty-three, whose acquaintance he made in Paris in 1588. Marie de Gournay was born in

*connexion with Marie de Gournay.*

[1] III. iii. p. 208.
[2] III. v.
[3] III. iii. p. 207.
[4] I. xix. p. 56.

1565[1]. She had been much struck with the *Essais*, which had fallen in her way about 1586; and in 1588 being with her mother in Paris, where he was superintending the edition of that year, she wrote expressing her admiration. Montaigne, pleased with the spontaneous tribute, called the next day, and spent a month or two with them in Picardy before his return to the south. There is nothing to show that she was ever at Montaigne in his lifetime, though he eulogizes her in his most intimate self-revelation[2], and, dying, sent her a message of farewell. Her correspondence with the scholar Justus Lipsius and the latter's amazed profession of admiration for her genius remind one of the similar relation between Politian and the learned Cassandra Fedele. Montaigne's widow committed to her care the printing of the posthumous edition of the Essais (1595), which Pierre de Brach, the Gascon poet, had first revised: and not till after its issue did she visit the château in Perigord, when she spent fifteen months of friend-

[1] Bonnefon, ii. 317.
[2] II. xvii. p. 57.

liest intercourse with the widow and daughter[1]. She was editress of a far later and somewhat modernized edition, 1635, and died in 1645, in her seventy-ninth year[2]. From this literary friendship we can, I think, conclude but little; albeit it shows on Montaigne's part a certain generosity, kindly responsiveness, and openness, at fifty-five, to new relations.

*Attitude on marriage.*

It is to his married life that we naturally turn, to his relations with the young wife whom he married in 1565, when she was eighteen or nineteen and he thirty-two. From the tone of the *Essais* about wives in general we should almost infer a cat-and-dog existence, tempered by a humorous recognition on the philosopher's part that women, poor things, are made so. 'It is ever proper unto women,' we read, 'to be readily bent to contradict and crosse their husbands'[3]: they usually reserve the display of affection till their widowhood[4]: they take up an opinion in a temper and stick to it[5]: and their suspicion,

[1] Bonnefon, ii. 197–8. [2] *Ib.* ii. 317.
[3] II. viii. p. 362. [4] II. xxxv. p. 130. [5] II. xxxii. p. 112.

vanity and curiosity are simply incurable[1]. They are brought up on an artificial, hothouse method which a man had better leave alone—there is no hope of understanding it, it is all so foolish; witness his own daughter, Léonore, whom he has left to her mother's care[2]. Their modesty is largely an affectation: if they choose, they can give men lessons in naughtiness[3]. Mari de Gournay is quite an exception: he has great hopes of her—there is nothing in the world he esteems more; and in spite of his dislike of the affectation of learning by modern ladies[4], Marie's mind 'shal one day be capable of many notable things, and amongst others of the perfection of this thrice holy friendship, whereunto we read not her sex could yet attaine'[5]. Constantly Montaigne distinguishes love from the sober practical relation of married folk[6]; and thinks La Boëtie's love-sonnets must needs have more fire than those written when

[1] III. v. p. 255. [2] III. v. pp. 240-1. [3] *Ib.*
[4] III. iii. pp. 205-6. [5] II. xvii. p. 57.
[6] III. v. p. 234 'Ceulx qui pensent faire honneur au mariage, pour y joindre l'amour . . . . . choses qui ont quelque cousinage, mais il y a beaucoup de diversité'.

he wooed his wife in marriage and 'began to feele I wot not what maritale chilnesse'[1]. In his dedication to his own wife of Plutarch's consolatory letter on the loss of a child[2] this 'je ne sçay quelle froideur maritale' is rather sadly apparent. Altogether it seems a hard illiberal attitude in one whose views are otherwise much in advance of his time. There is no sign that he recognizes marriage as an equal union, no sympathy, no suggestion of playing up to your partner's good cards. And of course there is much in the *Essais* that is frankly coarse.

*His wife.*

Yet it is quite unfair to judge a man of that rude age by the purer standards and more liberal notions of to-day, even if we are sure that modern life demonstrates his lack of these as a misfortune. Something may be put down to mere humorous teasing; something, again, to his perverse pleasure in showing himself in an unflattering light. But it is difficult to avoid the sense of chronic irritation. Probably his wife lacked comprehension of, and sympathy with, his work, perhaps let him see that she thought it mere idleness. His unpractical

[1] I. xxviii. p. 160. [2] Letter viii.

business-habits, again, might well breed dispute, when he was at home, between him and the careful housewife who managed so well for him when he was away. We can imagine the little man, brought up against a dead wall of passive resistance, working off his annoyance in an essay when he got upstairs to his library. One remembers, too, how easily his chance reading passed into his text, and that the *Libro Aureo* of the Spanish misogynist, Guevara, was very popular in France, and one of his father's favourite books [1]. Even as it is he has some things remarkable for this date. He makes tolerant excuses for frailty in women, and blames men for exacting from them a standard they do not aim at for themselves. He tells us 'It is treason for one to marry unless he wed . . . I have (and that to my spight and griefe) seene husbands hate their wives, onely because themselves wronged them' [2]; adding naively that, though he himself married only for convenience, he hasn't found it

[1] 'entre les espagnols, luy estoit ordinaire celuy qu'ils nommoient *Marc Aurèle*,' II. ii. p. 315. His father, who knew Spanish, would not need Réné Bertaut's translation of 1531.

[2] III. v. p. 237.

nearly so bad as he supposed, and has been a more faithful husband than he at all expected [1]. My impression is that he compared favourably with his contemporaries not only in this respect, but in the perhaps harder matter of daily generosity and gentleness.

Françoise de La Chassaigne seems at least to have taken up loyally the subordinate rôle allotted her. It must be largely due to her that he is able, in 1588, to report his estate as nothing impaired, spite of his indolence, practical ignorance, and frequent expense in travel [2]: it must be through her letters that he 'surveys and governs' his house in his absence[3]. There is no direct evidence of any jealousy of Mlle de Gournay, whom she readily associated with herself in the literary task of honouring her dead husband. Her faithful efforts to secure for him a fitting material monument in the church of the Feuillants, at Bordeaux, were not crowned with success before 1614 [4]. In 1627 she died, at the age of eighty-three, having survived him thirty-

[1] III. v. p. 236.
[2] III. ix. pp. 335, 337.
[3] III. ix. p. 363.
[4] Bonnefon, ii. 202-5.

five years. Their daughter, Léonore, had died, after a second marriage, in 1616[1]. It is noteworthy that, some years after her father's death, she had presented his whole library to an abbè in the diocese of Auch. The great majority of the books have disappeared, and with them the notes with which he was wont occasionally to enrich them, as he tells us in the essay 'On Books', where he quotes the estimate made after reading Guicciardini and De Comines. His copy of Caesar, however, read between February 25 and July 21, 1578, and containing more than 600 notes and the estimate afterwards developed in the thirty-fourth essay of the Second Book, is fortunately among the seventy-six volumes which have survived[2].

*His mayoralty:*

In regard to his mayoralty, wherein he has been accused with some show of reason of slackness, we must remember that, under his military predecessors, who were often called away, much of the administrative work had devolved upon subordinates, and the post had become largely ornamental.

[1] Bonnefon, ii. 209. [2] *Ib.* i. 248, 264, 268.

If Montaigne was a good deal absent, he had some excuse in his illness, and the fact that his château was within a day's ride. He had accepted the post reluctantly, with protests that he had no intention of enslaving himself to it, as his father had done; yet the documents which have come down, among them one evincing his care for foundling children[1], show his active interest in, and knowledge of, the town's affairs. In the difficult months of the recrudescence of the League's activity (1585), when he and the lieutenant-general, Marshal de Matignon, both anxious to preserve Bordeaux in loyalty to Henri III, had to pit themselves against the plots of the Guises on the one hand and the astute diplomacy of Navarre on the other, Montaigne is full of energy and sufficiency, though he feels the strain as the danger thickens round him. In the great visitation of the Plague, which occurred

*reserve of energy,*

[1] Against Montaigne's expressed intolerance of babies, II. viii. p. 355, and feeling that children are not indispensable to a complete life, III. ix. p. 389, we should put his advocacy of a reasoned indulgence in their treatment, in the former essay, and his declaration, I. xxv. p. 131, 'A la verité, nous veoyons encores qu'il n'est rien si gentil queles petits enfants en France.'

in his last two months of office, he absented himself from the city—rather, its advent found him absent, and he did not return. But most of the magistrates and a large proportion of the population did the same: it did not occur to any one to blame him before the ingenious nineteenth century, nor does he in speaking of his mayoralty[1] let fall one word of self-exculpation on this head. The sole criticism which he notices is that of having done nothing marked during his four years' term of office, of taking things too quietly. There were, it seems, in those benighted days, folk whose notion of efficiency was to do everything with an air, with a fanfare of trumpets. Montaigne makes the admirable reply that quietness is not necessarily inaction: that it is mere self-advertisement 'to refer that to be done in the market-place which a man may do in the counsel-chamber; and at noone day what might have been effected the night before; and to be jealous to doe that himselfe

*dislike of fuss.*

[1] III. x: Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux Lundis*, vi. 239-64. Contrast, however, the magnanimous resolution of the Lord Mayor, sheriffs and officers not to quit London, in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, 1665.

which his fellow can performe as well'[1]. He had the dislike of fuss proper to those with a strong sense of facts. He had reserves of energy on which he could call at need, and was emphatically a man who loved to be better than his word. The Bordelais had elected him, not for his literary repute, which hardly existed in 1581, but partly as his father's son, partly as one held in respect by the great party-leaders, and also, I think, as a hard-headed fellow who drove at practice. Montaigne did not require the constant attendance of a full band. He knew how to keep his hands sometimes in his pockets: he could express himself without laying them perpetually on his heart. After all, there are quite a number of occasions which may be allowed to pass without invoking all the powers of the upper and nether world. 'Just Heaven!' once exclaimed one of these impassioned beings, 'I may be weak, erring; but have I deserved a blow like this?' With deep commiseration, with tremulous sympathy, his friends crowded round him, and inquired the cause

[1] III. x. p. 412.

of his complaint. It turned out that he had mislaid his tobacco-pouch.

*His self-depreciation,*

So much may fairly be urged in regard to Montaigne's selfishness, his harsh attitude to women, and his alleged failure in official life, without wholly denying the justice of the impeachment. To the long catalogue of his self-accusations in the essay 'De la Presumption', the seventeenth essay of the Second Book, written c. 1576–8—one which M. Bonnefon calls 'le vrai portique des Essais', and rightly holds as the fullest portrait of their author—it is perhaps vain to attempt an answer. Yet as we hear him enumerating his low stature, unpleasing voice, and stiff fingers; his want of common knowledge and ordinary aptitude, his slow apprehension and feeble memory; his panic nervousness, weak refusal to hear bad news, indecision and extreme indolence; we reflect that there is less of humility here than pride. It is something the temper of Cordelia who, in face of professions she knows to be false, insists on stating her own merits in the very lowest terms that truth will allow. Montaigne is snapping his fingers in the face of

*largely ironical.*

a world of showy pretence, that covers vices and meannesses which he scorns. In the excellent essay 'De l'art de Conférer' (III. viii) he tells us that he chooses self-depreciation as redounding more to the credit of what he most admires in himself; and always the self-dispraise has reference rather to an absolute standard than to any current in the world around him. It is quite compatible with the belief that others are worse. For instance, he doesn't care for his own poetry 'except in comparison of other compositions worse then mine, to which I see some credit given'—some folk are so easily pleased with their own performances[1]. In speaking, he lacks the light touch which others have 'because they conceive not of things but by the outward shew'[2]. His memory is bad, and he would distrust it more, but that other folk so often go wrong by disbelieving his account[3]. He recognizes his unfitness for public life, but chiefly because among the skipping, apish, Frenchmen of the day his good qualities are

[1] II. xvii. p. 31. [2] *Ib.* p. 33.
[3] III. xiii. p. 465.

lost[1]. Himself delighting in qualifying phrases[2] and balance of view, there is nothing he so detests as the ignorance of one's own limitations, the blatant cocksureness which, proved wrong again and again, will still 'stand upon his *ergoes*, as presumptuously resolute as before'—'ce testu indocile,' 'this indocile block-headed ass' translates Florio, almost adequately to the occasion[3]. Philosophically, he endorses the god's precept, 'know thyself': practically, he sees how terribly it handicaps a man amid a world of positive fools[4].

*Temper in which he retired from Bordeaux.*

From utterances like these we can perceive a tinge of bitterness in the temper in which Montaigne retired, in 1570, from the Bordeaux magistracy, and after publishing La Boëtie's works at Paris, settled himself to a life of study at his château. In earlier years he had probably entertained the usual ambitions, but experience had convinced him of his want of aptitude for either Court-life or affairs. Such a conviction, never easy of acceptance, is doubly bitter when a man

[1] II. xvii. p. 41. [2] III. xi. p. 420.
[3] III. xiii. p. 467. [4] III. ix. p. 391; xiii. p. 466.

feels his failure due in part to his very superiority. The crisis furnishes no light test of character. Some men, rather than accept the foil, subdue their hand to what it works in, and learn to imitate, though with palpable limp, the agilities they despise. Others, acquiescing in the inevitable, bury themselves in a contented sloth, or wrap themselves coldly in the threadbare garment of a bitter pride. Yet others, summoning all their resources, ransacking their utmost treasury, contrive, amid the wreck of earlier hopes, to fasten on some plank which may yet waft them shoreward—some art, faculty, means of expression, that may report them aright to the world. Without this spur of wounded pride, this sense of powers unrecognized, we should have lacked many a triumph: we should never, perhaps, have heard of Dante, we might never have read *Paradise Lost*. Something, I think, of the sting of failure helped Montaigne to conquer his natural indolence, and enabled him to produce the *Essais*.

*Sense of failure spurs him to effort.*

Their very bulk and wealth are adequate proof that he did conquer it. With his book before us we feel the charges of sloth and poor

memory untenable, at least irreconcilable. It speaks either to an immense diligence or to a most retentive mind, and probably to both. We know that he was helped by an amanuensis, for he tells us that the boy thus employed stole some of his MS.[1] Doubtless, too, the desultoriness of his method saved him the most laborious side of composition. But by whatever methods his results are won, they still represent an enormous toil. Sentences like the following are not written by the idler or dilettante in days when the tools and instruments of study are still imperfect :—

'Historie hath knowne three Socrates, five Platoes, eight Aristotles, seven Xenophons, twenty Demetriuses twenty Theodores: besides which, imagine how many came not to her knowledge.'[2]

*Motive of economy.*

It seems doubtful, however, if he retired with any distinct purpose of literary production. Probably economy was his leading motive; for the conveyance of his brothers' portions on his father's death, in 1568, must have much diminished the rent-roll of the estate. In the fortieth essay of the

[1] II. xxxvii. p. 144. [2] I. xlvi. p. 260.

First Book [1] he marks three stages in his attitude to money: the first, when he had no settled income, a time of rather lavish expenditure; the second, a period when he had money, and was anxiously preoccupied with saving it; while in the third he has acquired the just mean, and learned to regulate his expenses by the variation in his receipts. The second of these, that of over-careful husbandry, doubtless corresponds to the years immediately following his accession to the property. In his library, of about a thousand books [2], he would find a natural relief from the boredom of the country and the worries of a management in which he has to force an interest; but the Latin inscription there, dated February 28, 1571, though it speaks of his 'retiring to the bosom of the learned virgins', contemplates no fruit from that converse other than 'liberty, tranquillity and ease' [3]. In the seclusion of this famous room, on the second floor of a separate tower [4], he probably sought at first little more

*Of self-cultivation.*

[1] I. xl. p. 234. [2] III. xii. p. 448.
[3] It is quoted in Bonnefon, i. 228.
[4] Fully described, III. iii. pp. 211–12.

than the recovery of that early zest with which he had devoured the Latin authors as a boy[1]. But since he left the Collège de Guienne (1546), there had appeared Jacques Amyot's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (1559) and *Moralia* (1572); and Montaigne, who read Greek with difficulty[2], fastened on Amyot with avidity. These, with Seneca's *Epistles*, were his favourite books, because in them he found human nature 'scatteringly and loosely handled'[3], agreeably to his own humour, ever impatient of system. To assist his weak memory, to clear his notions and make his knowledge more available for life, he would soon begin to take notes; and original reflections and the idea of essays would naturally follow. His admission that some of the earliest 'smack a little of the foreigner'[4] supports the idea that he began with mere note-taking; and from the passage in the essay 'De l'Oysifveté', where he calls his work a register of vagrant fancies begotten by his

*Begins with mere note-taking.*

[1] I. xxv. p. 140. [2] I. xxv. p. 140; II. iv. p. 333, x. p. 376.
[3] II. x. p. 379.
[4] 'De mes premiers Essays, aulcuns puent un peu l'estrangier': II. v. p. 261.

liberty in retirement[1], we should certainly infer that there was no original intention of authorship.

*Professed motive, self-portraiture,*

Of similarly casual origin was, I feel sure, that purpose of self-revelation which he pretends is his sole object.

> 'It is a melancholy humour,' he tells Madame d'Estissac, '... produced by the tedium of the solitude in which I was plunged some years since, that first put into my head this fancy of meddling with writing. Thereupon, finding myself utterly unprovided and destitute of all other matter, I presented myself unto myself as argument and subject.'[2]

Taken literally, the statement is palpably false. Spite of constant personal details, the waves that break upon us successively in this book of his have the weight and volume of the great sea itself, and not of any mere inland lakelet puffed into petty fury by gusts of private vanity. They have travelled far, and are hoarse with a deeper passion.

*fitfully present*

Not but what he affords us fairly full information on certain aspects of his life—on his boyhood in the essay 'De l'Institution des Enfants' (I. xxv), on his connexion with La Boëtie in that 'De

[1] I. ix. p. 25. [2] II. viii. p. 353.

l'Amitié' (I. xxvii), on his reading in that 'Des Livres' (II. x), on his general character and capacities in that 'De La Presumption' (II. xvii), on his travels both there and in III. ix, on his home-life and other incidents in II. xvii, II. vi, III. iii, and elsewhere, on his mayoralty in III. x, on the civil war and the plague in III. xii, and on many personal habits and tastes in the closing essay 'De l'Experience' (III. xiii). But what proportion does autobiography bear to the whole, and how much of it appears only in the Third Book? Had this been his original purpose, would it not have been more steadfastly adhered to, and the ground mapped out in more systematic fashion? One notices how often the personal reference is rather to his method and intention in the essays than to any actual experience, and that these explanations often occur at the beginning of an essay. 'Je prends,' he says, 'de la fortune le premier argument.'[1] I believe that the whole idea of self-portraiture, and the statement made to Madame d'Estissac, have their origin simply in the difficulty,

*and probably of casual origin.*

[1] I. l. p. 280.

partly nervous, experienced whenever he began to write. It is the difficulty of a man without system. Time after time, as he sits himself down in the tower, he is betrayed by wandering thoughts, by indolent inability to concentrate: he reproaches himself for his stupidity—why cannot he do what he climbed that corkscrew staircase in order to do? These reproaches, or their answering excuses, are taken perforce as his starting-point of composition. By and by their recurrence suggests the very thread of unity which he feels his work to lack, and the direct purpose of self-portraiture is boldly embraced and announced. Then he sets to work to convert it into a reality by writing special autobiographic essays, and interpolating personal details all over the work: yet, when all is done, it remains his ostensible rather than his real purpose.

*His defence of it.*

Egotism, however, of malice prepense requires excuse: 'le *moi*,' says Pascal, 'est haïssable.' Montaigne finds it in the reflection that he has so little that is good to say of himself. The exposure of his shortcomings may be a warning to others: it will be still more useful to himself. His attitude

of moralist will act as a check upon him: he will be ashamed to yield to faults he has just rebuked, and being so constantly to appear in public must keep himself well-combed[1]. There is truth and nobility in the argument. Montaigne knew that high teaching is not invalidated by poor practice[2]; but he knew, too, that the true happiness of teaching is his alone whose life is loyal to his text. Far the best of these exculpatory passages is the dignified defence at the end of the sixth essay of the Second Book. I can only summarize it.

'You bid me,' he says, 'announce myself by my work and deeds, not by mere words. But my reflections *are* my work; they can find no expression save in words, and hardly in them. The issues of action are never pure; they are more eloquent of chance than of ourselves. Self-estimate, I grant, needs wisdom; self-announcement a conscience. Did I think myself perfectly good and wise, I would thunder it out. To depreciate oneself is folly, not modesty—cowardice, Aristotle says: virtue makes no such false statements, and truth no such mistakes. Verbal overpraise of self is not always seriously meant: the real essence of the vice is self-complacency; and the remedy is the exact opposite to what is commonly prescribed—to think, not less about oneself, but more. To confound self-occupation with self-satisfaction is the

[1] II. vi. p. 347; III. ix. p. 368. [2] II. xxxi. p. 103.

error of those who have no image of themselves but in their business and affairs, who possess only a bowing acquaintance with their own souls. No man will plume himself on knowledge who considers the minds of the Past, or on valour who remembers Scipio, Epaminondas, and the hosts and nations who leave him so far behind. No detailed excellence can puff up him who recalls at the same time the weakness of his other parts, and the nothingness of human condition. Socrates earned the name of wise because he alone had taken to heart the god's precept "know thyself", and had reached a due self-contempt. He who has attained a self-knowledge like this, has nothing to fear from self-revelation.'

*Finds in himself the clue to mankind.*

But the soundest and most philosophic defence for the amiable egotism of the Essayist is that which occurs to him latest, that each man is a mirror of the mighty world, and may study it in himself. 'Chasque homme,' we read, 'porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition'[1]: and, in the last essay of all, 'The long attention I employ in considering myselfe enableth me also to judge indifferently of others... I have from mine infancy enured myselfe to view mine owne life in others' lives.'[2] He has grasped a truth that commends itself sooner or later, I believe, to all thoughtful folk, to every worthy worker in the field of letters, that

[1] III. ii. p. 189. [2] III. xiii. p. 467.

one's own soul is the true school for the study of mankind. A man must needs paint chiefly from himself, because no other can ever be so perfectly known to him. The outside world at best can give us only faint suggestion. The clue to its interpretation lies ever in ourselves. And the necessary corollary is that the best nurse of literature is, not society, but solitude. It is in solitude that men and women find their souls: it is only in silent hours that the mind can wrestle with the problems of life and character, or conduct that struggle between the creative and the critical energy which issues in fine form. Montaigne, at any rate, knew this well. He composes nowhere but in his own house[1]. In his library, he tells us, he spends the greatest part of his life's days, and wears out most hours of the day[2]. He tries 'to sequester that only corner from the communitie of wife, of children and of acquaintance . . . Miserable in my minde is he who in his owne home hath nowhere to be to himselfe . . . I deeme it somewhat more tolerable to be ever alone, then never to be able to

[1] II. xxxvii. p. 144. [2] III. iii. p. 212.

be so'.[1] Elsewhere, among critics, his work might have been done more correctly, 'but then it had beene lesse mine.'[2]

*Literature demands solitude more than society.*

Is not this worth our attention? If it be true that great work is seldom produced nowadays, is it not because we are more anxious to ventilate than to form our opinions, because we have grown to place overmuch trust in community and discussion, and seldom study that volume of our own soul which is the true interpreter to us of all other souls? In the dignified close of a memorable essay an ancient writer questioned sadly whether in those days of the Empire, days of greed and selfishness and degrading vice, freer political conditions were deserved, or should even be desired: he mourned rather the rarity of fine and uncorrupted judgement, and the probable extinction of what was noblest in literature and in life. And we, whose boast it is to have cast deep the strong foundations of that public freedom his friend had sighed for,—is our life the nobler, the loftier, our taste less enslaved to the trivial and the base? Have not we, too, lost depth of root? Do not we,

[1] III. iii. p. 212. [2] III. v. p. 260.

too, people a dwarfed and stunted age, an Age of the Platform and the At Home, of shallow insincerity, and 'light' handling, and 'bright' claptrap, which finishes nothing of all it attempts, and thinks to evade facts by a change of phrase;—a cheap age, which affirms too often that brisk positive and pushing type Montaigne abhorred, a type recalling the Sausage-seller and expressible, perhaps, as the Higher Counter-jumping;—a childish age, withal, which insists on knowing all we are doing and stays not to listen till we have done speaking, which plucks the white violets from their cool retreat, carries them an hour in its hot hand, and leaves their soiled tissue to wither on a bank in the sun;—an impish and impertinent age, intolerant of all who would fain be

> The still unravished brides of quietness,

outraging them with its preposterous claims, and deafening them as with a chatter of apes?

For diffusion, for popularization of the already acquired, popular methods are doubtless necessary. Our young democracy, crowding with eager faces the steps of the temple of knowledge, possesses the fullest claim upon our aid and sympathy. It

receives initiation, most naturally, through novel, lecture, speech and newspaper, at the hands of teachers not too far removed from the taught. Unhappily, such popular ministration confers a wholly undue ascendancy which depresses automatically, if it does not suppress deliberately, a spirit other than its own. For fresh acquisition, for original production that is to last, for the lives and fortunes of those at grips with the great eternal difficulties—poets, thinkers, historians, slaves of the lamp and sappers of the chaos, on the issue of whose dim struggle so much of national worth and national fate ultimately depends—no! for such this popular mood, this cheap publicity, this disabling of the high and hard, is not well. Rather it tends to rob them of all that should cheer and aid and reward them; tends, therefore, to their extinction. *Fervet opus*—a fever of work! but when we with all our buzzing activities are quieted by the inevitable handful of dust, shall we have left those monuments which alone can speak us more than triflers?

## II

# MONTAIGNE AND HIS THOUGHT

*Originator of the Essay.*

It is not the least paradoxical circumstance about the whimsical old Gascon that he, the most garrulous of writers, should also be one of the fullest of matter. His fluency is never verbosity: he cares too much for truth to give us empty wind; he cares too little for style to utter mere confectionery. His very indifference to form earned him the distinction of introducing a new form to modern Europe —an excellent and delightful literary kind, that of the Essay—the essence of which lies in its being a frank communication of personal opinion; in its treatment of subjects, not as parts of a philosophic system, but as separate and detached; in its disclaimer alike of exhaustiveness and of conformity to received opinion. The correspondence of such a mode with Montaigne's special temperament is obvious. Perfect freedom in choice and handling of subject, absolute indifference to authority either

*Its marks.*

in what he said or how he said it—this, no less than this, was what he claimed : and the result has nobly vindicated the claim.

'The great merit of Montaigne,' says Hazlitt, 'was that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man . . . He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind, that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to, and fondly repeating, what others told him that they were. He got rid of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that follows at their heels ; because he could do without them.'

*Previous suggestion.*

The idea, of course, was not wholly new : it was familiar to the ancients. If Plutarch's shorter treatises are longer than the average essay of Montaigne, yet they present the same style, the same informal ease of manner, the same habit of copious and interesting illustration from history or daily life : and in Seneca's *Epistles*, as Bacon perceived [1], we have essays under another name. Even in his own day Montaigne had examples, at least for variety of topic and for informality, in current

[1] Dedication of the second edition of the *Essays* (1612) intended to Prince Henry.

publications of Letters or Discourses, such as the *Discours non plus mélancholiques que divers* of Bonaventure des Periers[1]. The canons of literary prose were yet unfixed. The very language was in a state of flux: Montaigne himself feels it daily changing under his hands[2], and in a vigorous passage deprecates the— *State of French prose.*

'miserable affectation d'estrangeté, des desguisements froids et absurdes, qui, au lieu d'eslever, abbattent la matiere: pourveu qu'ils se gorgiasent [se flattent] en la nouvelleté, il ne leur chault de l'efficace; pour saisir un nouveau mot, ils quittent l'ordinaire, souvent plus fort et plus nerveux . . . Le maniement et employte des beaux esprits donne prix à la langue; non pas l'innovant, tant, comme la remplissant de plus vigoreux et divers services,

[1] Noted by Lowndes, *Mich. de Montaigne*, p. 137.—It was M. Charles Nodier who, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Oct. 1839, first claimed for Des Periers (author of four Lucianic dialogues called *Cymbalum Mundi*, 1537, and of *Nouvelles Récréations*, 1548) these *Discours*, printed in 1557, a work usually assigned to his friend Jacques Pelletier, who gave them to the press. 'Les *Discours*,' says Nodier, 'appartiennent à ce genre d'écrits que l'on connaissait alors sous le nom de Diverses leçons, et qui aboutirent, sans beaucoup varier dans leur forme, au livre le plus éminent de notre ancienne littérature, les *Essais* de Montaigne. La philosophie sérieuse a moins de part aux *Discours* qu'aux *Essais*.'

[2] III. ix. p. 371.

l'estirant et ployant; ils n'y apportent point de mots, mais ils enrichissent les leurs, appesantissent et enfoncent leur signification et leur usage, luy apprennent des mouvements inaccoustumez, mais prudemment et ingenieusement.'[1]

French, he finds, has an abundant store of words, but some defect of manner; it lacks pliancy and vigour; it fails under a powerful conception, and makes you fain to help yourself out with Latin and Greek[2]. It is remarkable that one who felt thus, and to whom Latin was his mother-tongue, should have done so much to develop the latent capacities of French, and with so little foreign assistance. Linguistically he comes in some sense as the corrective of the Graecizing (and Latinizing) tendency of the Pléiade[3]. His copiousness is partly, no doubt, the result of reading, but also very largely of his pleasure in talk: and I gladly note, in qualification of some words at the close of the previous chapter, that, if Montaigne helped much to diffuse a full and varied vocabulary, French literature owes it to the fact that this

[1] III. v. pp. 258–9. [2] *Ib.*
[3] Bonnefon, i. 320.

great popular writer was not naturally, nor solely, a recluse, but a man of cheerful social habit [1].

But however mutable his instrument, however formless his own composition, none has a better claim to have invented and established the *genre*, the Essay. That it was a novelty, yet unrecognized, is sufficiently attested by the numerous passages in which he apologizes for and explains his method. The best examples are the beginning of the fiftieth essay of the First Book, of the tenth of the Second, and a passage not far from the end of the ninth of the Third. Method, indeed, is a word of more than doubtful application to work which appears the *ne plus ultra* of slipshod desultoriness, very far indeed from those delicate edifices, that lacework in stone, which the modern understands by the term, —airy trifles behind whose studied negligence hides so much toil of thought and art. Desultoriness is, no doubt, the ever-present danger and temptation of richly-stored and prolific minds, and one to which in our own day Ruskin was especially liable.

*His desultory method.*

[1] III. v. pp. 224-8, viii. 309 conversation is 'l'usage plus doulx que d'aulcune aultre action de nostre vie'.

Ruskin, perhaps, was hardly conscious of it; the Essayist is conscious and impenitent. He professes desultoriness: he is the apostle of literary undress, 'nouvelle figure, Un philosophe impremedité et fortuite.' [1]

'I have no other sergeant of band to marshall my rapsodies than fortune. And looke how my humours or conceites present themselves, so I shuffle them up.' [2]

Want of appropriateness is no reason why a thing should not be introduced, if it occurs to him: a good thing is good anywhere [3]. Subjects, indeed, are chosen and meditated beforehand [4]; but this shall not curtail his liberty of straying from them—how delightful is Plutarch when he does so!—though

[1] II. xii. p. 513. [2] II. x. p. 375.

[3] 'Semant icy un mot, icy un aultre, eschantillons desprins de leur piece, escartez, sans desseing, sans promesse; je ne suis pas tenu d'en faire bon, ny de m'y tenir moy mesme, sans varier quand il me plaist, et me rendre au doubte et incertitude, et à ma maistresse forme, qui est l'ignorance.' I. l. p. 280.

'Les belles matieres siesent bien, en quelque place qu'on les seme: moy, qui ay plus de soing du poids et utilité des discours que de leur ordre et suitte, ne doibs pas craindre de loger icy, un peu à l'escart une tres belle histoire.' II. xxvii. p. 88.

[4] I. l. pp. 279-80.

some connexion may still be found by the really careful reader [1]. Titles appear rather as ornamental appendages conceded to custom ; the reader is not to regard them as representative of the subject, though they may allude to it [2]. Fielding protested that the titles prefixed to his own intercalated moralizings were at least reliable, not like those of 'the celebrated Montaigne, who promises you one thing and gives you another' [3]. And elsewhere Montaigne characterizes his style, as

*Slipshod style.*

'A speech formlesse and abrupt, a popular gibrish, and a proceeding without definition, without partition, without conclusion.' [4] 'It is a naturall, simple, and unaffected speech that I love, so written as it is spoken, and such upon the paper, as it is in the mouth, a pithie, sinnowie, full, strong, compendious and materiall speech, not so delicate and affected as vehement and piercing.' [5]

Certainly he attains his ideal: there is no more chatty writer. The *Essais* have all the frank confidences, the incoherence, the personal note of private letters—a form he would even have chosen, had he

[1] III. ix. p. 385. [2] *Ib.* p. 384.
[3] *Joseph Andrews*, Bk. II. ch. i. [4] II. xvii. p. 32.
[5] I. xxv. p. 138 'un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré ; non tant delicat et peigné, comme vehement et brusque'.

not feared some check from the sense of a merely feigned correspondent [1]. Nor must we exaggerate his lack of style. He is not insensible to literary form; he is a critic of it: and if he himself shirks the toil of arrangement and often lets his pen run wild, yet there is an imaginative vigour of phrase throughout, often a sustained eloquence, and sometimes a passage elaborated with conscious skill, as for instance the story of the village whose Arcadian peace was ruined by the advent of a lawyer and a doctor [2]. And of course the literary habit grew upon him. The Third Book is manifestly better written than the earlier two, and in it he admits 'certaine verball wilie-beguilies whereat I shake mine eares' [3]. But matter is the mark he always drives at: it is his hold on matter that honourably distinguishes him from the legion of the prolix, and saves from tedium a method that would have been fatal in a poorer mind. 'Well I wot,' he says, 'that when I heare some give themselves to dwell on the phrase of my

*Becomes more literary.*

*Matter before form.*

[1] I. xxxix. p. 219. [2] II. xxxvii. p. 164.

[3] III. viii. end 'certaines finesses verbales dequoy je secoue les aureilles'.

Essayes, I would rather have them hold their peace : they doe not so much raise the words as depresse the sense.'[1] He would indignantly have repudiated the charge of want of thought[2]. The neglect to form *judgement* and character was, for him, the prime fault in the French education of the day, with its predilection for philological pedantry[3]. Scholar, in the contemporary or the modern sense, he could not claim to be. Scaliger dismisses him with some contempt as 'un hardi ignorant'[4], and the savants generally were slow to recognize his merit. Yet ignorant Montaigne was not. His wide reading in the Latin classics is obvious on every page; and, something like Lyly in England, he may claim to have done more to popularize the history and philosophy of the ancients than all the grammarians and schoolmasters put together[5]. In one place he

[1] I. xxxix. p. 218.
[2] I. l. beginning.
[3] I. xxiv and xxv.
[4] Lowndes, p. 93.
[5] The translators must of course claim a large share in this work of diffusion of classical thought: yet Lyly's novels were produced before North's *Lives* appeared, and Plutarch's *Moralia* were not Englished till 1602; nor can any mere translation possess the penetrating, educa-

says his 'book is meerely framed of the spoiles of Seneca and Plutarch'[1], though elsewhere he shows some sensitiveness on the score of originality.

*Originality*

Books afford him suggestion rather than substance: he 'had rather forge than furnish his mind'[2], and what he borrows he makes his own by weaving it into a fresh structure of thought[3]. He is careful to tell us that he meditates most fruitfully, not in his library, but on horseback[4]; and speaks with scorn of those 'botcherly patchcotes who stuffe their study with the rhapsodies of commonplaces', to which themselves contribute nothing but the ink and paper—'it is to teach men not that one can make a book, but to convince them that one cannot'[5]. Truth is nothing wiser by being aged: a man's own village may yield him examples as good as are in Homer or Plato[6].

*Obscured by over-illustration.*

This repudiation of over-quotation is very remarkable in one whose work, however original,

tive force of work which has made the originals its own and converts them to its own purposes.

[1] II. xxxii. beginning.
[2] III. iii. p. 203.
[3] II. x. beginning.
[4] III. v. p. 262.
[5] III. xii. p. 448.
[6] III. xiii. p. 473.

seems more full of borrowed matter than any book, perhaps, save *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. It is essential to note very carefully what he says on this point: it has a bearing not only on his originality but on the formlessness of which I have spoken. If, he tells us, he may seem to have 'gathered a nosegay of strange flowers', adding merely 'the thred to binde them', that is due to his daily habit of 'loading himself beyond his purpose and first form upon the fantaisie of time'[1]. This refers, no doubt, to his entry of parallel passages in the margin of his MS. or of the first edition. It seems to me very doubtful whether all these entries were made with definite intention to include them in the text: many may be there merely to save him the trouble of finding the passages again; though in 1588 his indolence, and in 1595 his other engagements, caused them to be embodied *en bloc*. Six hundred additions apart from the Third Book are announced on the title-page of 1588; while on

[1] 'Je m'en charge de plus fort touts les jours, oultre ma proposition et ma forme premiere, sur la fantasie du siecle, et par oysifveté.' III. xii. p. 447.

that of 1595 the total bulk is said to be swollen by a further one-third. The result of all this promiscuous addition has been very much to obscure both the originality and the structure of his work.

*Wealth of matter.*

What it cannot obscure is his intellectual wealth: what it cannot impair is his hold on our interest. Here, indeed, is 'God's plenty'! The *Essais* are a microcosm: they are more—a précis, almost, of preceding philosophy. It is not possible to be bored, if one will but skip some of the interminable quotations. A deep instinct for fact, a native power of brushing away the extrinsic and adventitious, made him infallible in his choice of interesting and fruitful material. Bolingbroke is surely far astray when he tells us that he often quotes Montaigne 'as I do Seneca, rather for the smartness of expression than the weight of matter'[1]. For the mind of this truth-lover is as an Ithuriel's spear, at touch of which all false shows vanish. There seems as it were a tacit alliance between him and the working spirit behind the veil of things; an intimate suggestion

[1] Letter 'On the true use of retirement and study'.

given him of the vital point, the real motive, the hidden error; a power of piercing through the crust of appearance to the very heart of truth. It is startling to hear him quietly telling De Thou at Blois in 1588, after years of religious war and massacre, that neither the Protestant leader nor the chiefs of the League had religion much at heart—that personal enmity and ambition was the main motive with them all [1]. It is a marvel to see him putting his finger on one foul blot after another in the practice and opinion of the time, yet with a complete impartiality, a perfect balance: championing the ancient faith, yet advocating liberty of conscience [2]; loyal to the king, yet friends with Henry of Navarre; protesting against the burning of witches [3], pronouncing all torture cruelty [4]; idolizing Paris [5], yet recognizing that France is but a little corner of the globe, reverencing the grandeur that was Rome [6], and not sanguine, like Du Bellay [7], that

*Balanced thought.*

[1] Bonnefon, ii. 160. [2] II. xix. [3] III. xi. pp. 421-4.
[4] II. v. pp. 337-8, xi. p. 396, xxvii. p. 89.
[5] III. ix. p. 360. [6] III. ix. p. 387.
[7] *Deffense*, passim.

the French tongue which he had so much enriched, could ever rival Latin; full of appreciation for the simple virtues of Mexico and Peru, and of sympathy for their fate[1]; an ardent sportsman, yet with pity for the hare and mercy for the deer[2]; condemning the intricacy of French law and the unfairness of French criminal procedure, yet aware that justice must ever include something of injustice[3]; possessed with the sense of the ceaseless change and infinite diversity of things, yet anticipating Burke's conception of the State as one complex, inter-connected whole, the parts of which cannot be disturbed without disaster[4]. More and more, as we read, the conviction forces itself upon us that here in this rough coarse humorist of the slipshod style we have one of the greatest, wisest, tenderest, and most delicate of men.

*Bacon and Montaigne: similarities.*

The perfume of clear-heartedness and natural goodness, disengaging itself from his work, is

[1] I. xxx; III. vi. end.

[2] 'Je ne prends guere beste en vie, à qui je ne redonne les champs.' II. xi. p. 398.

[3] III. xiii. pp. 456-64, i. beginning; II. xx. p. 67.

[4] I. xxii. p. 87; II. xvii. 51; III. i. beginning, ix. 343-4.

that which chiefly differentiates it from the *Essays* of Bacon. Indeed their object and spirit lie wide enough apart: yet the general difference has somewhat obscured, I think, a real connexion. Only once does Bacon mention Montaigne by name, in the essay 'Of Truth'; but a mind so possessed with the passion of intellectual freedom and revolt against tradition cannot fail to have been impressed with the fearless independence of the great Frenchman, whom it is at least possible that he had met during his two to three years' sojourn in France (1576–8), before the *Essais* were published[1]. It is never quite certain how far similarity of thought or expression may not be due to a common borrowing from the classics, and Bacon, like Montaigne, is redolent of Seneca and Plutarch: but, be that as it may, the English essays present a good deal more agreement

[1] A passage in Montaigne, which escapes me at present, was not long since suggested as possibly referring to Bacon. So far as I recollect, the tone was inconsistent with what would be likely in the elderly Montaigne towards a youth of 16–19; and he is not known to have quitted his home during the years of Bacon's stay.

with the French than in the mere matter of the borrowed title[1]. For instance, Montaigne's attitude to marriage is as cold and detached as Bacon's own: like Bacon, he puts friendship much above love; like Bacon, he sets small store by children[2]; like Bacon, he deprecates an illiberal attitude to them in the matter of money[3]. As

[1] Mr. S. H. Reynolds in his edition of Bacon's *Essays* (1890) thinks that Bacon had probably no high opinion of either Seneca or Montaigne, and was not unwilling to suggest the superior concentration and penetration of his own work. I add to the resemblances noted by myself below the following noted by Mr. Reynolds:—

Ess. i. 'a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself': cf. M. III. xi. p. 417 'Je treuve que nous ... conforme à nostre estre'.

Ess. ii. the Stoic preoccupation with death: cf. M. III. xii. pp. 430, 443: also 'he that dies in an earnest pursuit'; cf. M. III. iv. p. 217 'Celuy qui meurt en la meslée ... l'ardeur du combat l'emporte'.

Ess. xxxv. Of Prophecies—'men mark when they hit': cf. M. I. xi. p. 34 'J'en veoy qui estudient et glosent leurs almanacs ... infinis'.

Ess. lviii. Chinese knowledge of artillery: cf. M. III. vi. p. 295.

[2] 'n'ay jamais estimé qu'estre sans enfants feust un default qui deust rendre la vie moins complete et moins contente' &c. III. ix. p. 389.

[3] II. viii. pp. 355-6: Bacon 'Of Parents and Children'.

regards religion their attitude is very similar: both uphold tolerance and balance in controversy; both deprecate persecution; both yield to faith supremacy over reason where the two conflict, though Montaigne's Christianity, if traditional rather than intellectual, was probably warmer than the quasi-political or sociological sentiment which regulated rather than animated the Englishman. He shares, as we have seen, Bacon's dislike and impatience with the complexities of the existing legal code: he is at one with Bacon in opposing the extravagant pitch to which duelling was carried in either country[1]; Bacon appeals to the fact that the most abusive language was used in public by the orators of Greece or Rome without exciting any such fatal consequences[2], and Montaigne gives instances of such in his eulogy of Caesar[3]. There are points of more abstract

[1] II. xxvii. pp. 83-6.

[2] Bacon's speech on presenting his Charge touching Duels (1613) (*Life and Letters*, vol. iv. p. 406)—the passage is quoted in Dr. Abbott's ed. of the *Essays*, vol. i. p. cxxxvi.

[3] II. xxxiii. pp. 117-19.

opinion where Bacon seems to be following, or at least coincides with, the great Frenchman. In a notable passage in the *Historia Vitae et Mortis*[1], as well as in Essay xlii, he allots the same moral superiority to youth over age as does Montaigne[2]. In spite of his permission of concealment and deceit, he recognizes that 'clear and round dealing is the honour of man's nature'[3]; just as Montaigne had said 'Nothing makes us men and no other mean keeps us bound one to another, but our word'[4]. In his essay 'Of Death' he borrows Montaigne's, or Seneca's, reflection that the terror of it is mainly in the gloomy pageantry wherewith men have surrounded it[5]: with Montaigne he

[1] *Works* (ed. Ellis and Spedding), vol. v. pp. 319–20.

[2] III. ii. p. 201 'je le disois estant jeune; lors on me donnoit de mon menton par le nez: je le dis encores à cette heure, que mon poil gris m'en donne le credit'.

[3] Essay 'Of Truth', which contrast with that 'Of Simulation and Dissimulation'.

[4] 'En verité, le mentir est un mauldict vice: nous ne sommes hommes, et nous ne tenons les uns aux aultres, que par la parole.' I. ix. p. 28.

[5] *Essais*, I. xix. end. The reference to Seneca is given as *Epistle*, xxiv—'Tolle istam pompam, sub qua lates' &c. It has not, I think, been noticed that William Drummond's

recognizes the disadvantages of a supreme position which leaves little to desire, but much to fear[1]: he shares Montaigne's detestation of logic and word-spinning[2], he sees how much time is wasted on mere language-study, he demands fruit. Montaigne, however, had more reverence for Aristotle, and for the ancients in general, than Bacon.

*Distinctions*

And of course it is vain to deny that the minds of the two men present differences as marked as do their lives. The object, character, and style of the two books is dissimilar. With Montaigne, spite of the unavowed presence of the spirit of the moral reformer, the predominant idea is to clear his mind, assist his memory, amuse himself, and leave a portrait to his friends: Bacon's object, as the alternative title affixed in 1625 (*Counsels Civill and Morall*) informs us, is to train men for practical and public life. There could hardly be a stronger

beautiful essay on death, 'A Cypress Grove,' borrows much from this essay of Montaigne.

[1] Cf. the opening of the essay 'Of Empire' with Montaigne I. xlii. pp. 247–9, III. vii. end.

[2] Cf. *Essais*, III. viii. p. 313 with *The Advancement of Learning*, I. iv. 5; and for philology, *Essais*, I. xxiv, xxv. with *Advancement*, I. iv. 2, 3.

contrast than that apparent between the desultory, garrulous, prolix utterance of the one, and the terse, packed, precise, and generally orderly notes of the other; between the arbitrary handling of Montaigne, dictated largely, as he confesses, by accident, and continually digressing to personal matters, and the governed, methodical, scientific, and impersonal procedure of Bacon; between the former's warm-blooded, sympathetic interest in what he treats, his frank confession of ignorance and faulty equipment, his uncertainty of his own powers, and the latter's cold, passionless impartiality, his positive and magisterial air, his habit of regarding himself as the repository of all knowledge. For Montaigne, after all, discussion is the main thing: he has too deep-seated a distrust of human powers to expect any very valuable result, and too little patience and industry to get to the end of a subject. For Bacon decision, fruit, is the object: his confidence in human capacity is boundless; and his own patience and industry are equal to enormous effort, if hardly to one commensurate with his mighty aim. Montaigne will enjoy, and suggests the

same quiet Epicureanism to others: Bacon will achieve, and show others how to do so. There is a world between the golden mean of the one and the arduous ambition of the other; and the moral contrast is as marked as the intellectual. Montaigne's teaching exhibits the higher standard on all points of practice save the gratification of the senses. He upholds disinterested virtue; he expressly repudiates the political doctrines of Machiavelli, cannot away with falseness and dissimulation in princes[1], and does not believe in any profit to be reaped by wars of aggression[2]. Nothing is worth more to him than his personal happiness and self-respect[3]. With Bacon success in life is the great object, and the doctrines of Machiavelli colour his views at every turn. I need not labour further a contrast sufficiently apparent: Montaigne's is as indisputably the warmer and the nobler heart, as Bacon's is the grander and more potent intellect.

[1] II. xvii. pp. 42-3, 50.
[2] II. xxiii. p. 75; contrast Bacon's essay 'Of Empire'.
[3] III. ii. pp. 191-2.

*As critic.* There is a special aspect of Montaigne's work that should not be overlooked: he is almost the earliest critic of critical France, in the modern sense of appreciator, a sense that cannot be applied to earlier work such as Du Bellay's *Deffense* 1549, Ronsard's *Préface de la Franciade*, or *Abregé* of 1565, or Henri Estienne's *Précellence du Langage françois* 1579—work that was occupied either with language or with Aristotelian or Horatian theory[1]. Montaigne, who wrote verse himself and 'claims some insight into other men's labours'[2], laments that France has 'more poets than judges and interpreters of Poesie'[3]. Certainly his scattered remarks must have done something to awaken critical faculty. He professes the highest admiration for Ronsard and Du Bellay, who have found, he thinks, but ill successors; though Aurat, Beza, Buchanan, L'Hôpital, Mont-dorè,

[1] J. C. Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* 1561, though mainly concerned with theory, did contain in its 5th and 6th Books a large amount of criticism on Greek and Latin poets and on contemporary Latin verse. But Scaliger wrote in Latin.

[2] II. xvii. p. 30.

[3] I. xxxvi. p. 201.

and Adrian Turnebus, are 'bons artisans' of Latin verse[1]. The words that follow the just-noticed complaint of the want of critics are evidence of his own essential grasp of the matter, and seem to me distinctly reminiscent of a passage in the *De Sublimitate*, the *editio princeps* of which had been given to the world by Robortello in 1554[2].

[1] I. xxv. p. 137; II. xvii. p. 56.

[2] 'Voicy merveille: nous avons bien plus de poëtes que de juges et interpretes de poësie; il est plus aysé de la faire que de la cognoistre. A certaine mesure basse, on la peult juger par les preceptes et par art: *mais la bonne, la supreme, la divine, est au dessus des regles et de la raison.* Quiconque en discerne la beaulté d'une veue ferme et rassise, il ne la veoid pas, *non plus que la splendeur d'un esclair*: elle ne practicque point nostre jugement; *elle le ravit et ravage.* La fureur qui espoinçonne celuy qui la sçait penetrer, fiert encores un tiers à la luy ouyr traicter et reciter . . . il se veoid plus clairement aux theatres' &c., I. xxxvi. p. 201. Cf. *De Sublim.* i. 4 *οὐ γὰρ εἰς πειθὼ τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ἀλλ' εἰς ἔκστασιν ἄγει τὰ ὑπερφυῆ· . . . καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐμπειρίαν τῆς εὑρέσεως καὶ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων τάξιν καὶ οἰκονομίαν οὐκ ἐξ ἑνὸς οὐδ' ἐκ δυεῖν, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὅλου τῶν λόγων ὕφους μόλις ἐκφαινομένην ὁρῶμεν, ὕψος δέ που καιρίως ἐξενεχθὲν τά τε πράγματα δίκην σκηπτοῦ πάντα διεφόρησεν καὶ τὴν τοῦ ῥήτορος εὐθὺς ἀθρόαν ἐνεδείξατο δύναμιν*: and xv. 2 *ὃ δ' ἐφαντάσθη, μικροῦ δεῖν θεάσασθαι καὶ τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἠνάγκασεν.* The author's contrast of Cicero's diffuseness with Demosthenes' abrupt and rugged vigour (c. xii) is also something similar to Montaigne's

I have already mentioned his estimates of Guicciardini and De Comines in the essay 'Des Livres', which is full of criticism: but it is the Latin authors on whom he expatiates most frequently and fully. We have his remarks on Virgil, Lucretius, Lucan, Plautus and Terence in the same essay; we have his comparison of Seneca and Plutarch here and in II. xxxii, his contrast of five poetical utterances about Cato the Younger (I. xxxvi), his remarks on Caesar's style (II. x. p. 383 and xxxiv) and on Froissart, his estimate of Tacitus (III. viii. pp. 328–30), and notably his contention, remarkable in that age of Cicero-worship, that the great orator is largely wind, that his preparatives and prologues leave but a small net residuum of thought and argument (II. x. pp. 380–1). Everywhere in these critical utterances he shows a convincing good-sense equal to Samuel Johnson's, and a taste much finer. His own work is subjected to the same scalpel: he is

view of him, though softened for the ears of Roman readers. Montaigne might have read the treatise, if not in the Greek, yet in the Latin translation of Pagano, *Venetiis*, 1572.

far from overrating it. Even in 1588 when, he tells us, 'publike favor hath given me some more boldness then I hoped for,'[1] he still professes the greatest uncertainty. He knows how one may be deceived, both by partiality and by want of critical insight, and 'places the Essays now low, now high, with much inconstancy and indecision'[2].

*Slight interest in Art.*

Little in his work speaks to an interest in art other than literary. The work of some painter employed to decorate rooms at Montaigne, who placed a finished picture in the middle of each wall and filled the surrounding space with grotesques, supplies him with a modest image for his own essays, in which he says Stephen La Boëtie shall serve as centre-piece[3]. There is a passage alluding to the emotional effect of music, for which whether vocal or instrumental he owns a personal incapacity, and of the vast gloom of Gothic interiors[4]. While

[1] III. ix. p. 351. [2] III. viii. p. 327.

[3] I. xxvii. p. 148.

[4] 'Il n'est cœur si mol, que le son de nos tabourins et de nos trompettes n'eschauffe, ny si dur, que la doulceur de la musique n'esveille et ne chatouille; ny ame si revesche, qui ne se sente touchee de quelque reverence à considerer cette vastité sombre de nos eglises, la diversité

in Italy, he seems to have paid small attention to the painters, preoccupied rather with the life around him, or the remains of vanished greatness, among which those of ancient sculpture claim a passing interest [1]. But however little of a Greek, however little of an artist he may be, his view of life at least

*Harmonious view of life.*

d'ornements et ordre de nos cerimonies, et ouïr le son devotieux de nos orgues, et l'harmonie si posee et religieuse de nos voix.' II. xii. p. 562: and, for his incapacity to learn, II. xvii. p. 37.

[1] He records—'J'y vis aussi plusieurs excellentes statues, et notamment une nymphe dormante, une morte et une Pallas celeste, l'Adonis qui est chez l'éveque d'Aquino, la Louve de bronse et l'Enfant qui s'arrache l'espine du Capitole, le Laocoon et l'Antinous de Belvedere, la Comedie du Capitole, le Satyre de la vigne du cardinal Sforça et de la nouvelle besouigne, le Moise [Michel Angelo's] en la sepulture de S. Pietro *in vincula* [sic], la belle fame [femme] qui est aus pieds du pape Pol tiers en la nouvelle église de S. Pierre [an almost nude figure of Justice by Guglielmo della Porta]. Ce sont les statues qui m'ont le plus agréé à Rome.' (*Voyages*, ed. 1837, p. 703 b.) There is the briefest reference to some historical pictures 'en la salle audevant la chapelle S. Sixte', and to some portraits of contemporary Roman ladies in the 'palais du S$^{or}$ Jan George Cesarin'. At Venice, which he surveyed diligently, he entirely ignores the painters. At the Pitti in Florence he remarks only an antique (a chimaera) and the statue of a mule that had pulled much stone for the building.

exhibits in an eminent degree that Greek spirit of harmony and proportion which underlies the best art, the best criticism. How carefully does he abstain from undue exaltation of intellectual pursuits! Books are delightful, 'the best munition I have found in this human peregrination,' [1] but not worth the sacrifice of health and spirits: this appetite must be controlled like the rest [2]. Peasants live lives of heroic toil and patience, who never heard of Aristotle or Cato [3]. Practical failure as he rather feels himself to be, he will not depose that side of things from the position which facts accord it. Continually he drives at practice: even on his bookish side he aims, not at being a great writer, a profound thinker, but a sound, capable and happy man. 'Mon metier et mon art, c'est vivre,' [4] he cries: and the epilogue to Madame de Duras contains a passage which all men of letters should learn by heart—

'I take no count of goods which I have not been able to employ in my life's service. Whatever I be, I would be elsewhere than on paper: my art and industry have

[1] III. iii. p. 311.
[2] I. xxxviii. pp. 213–14.
[3] III. xii. p. 431.
[4] II. vi. p. 348.

been employed to make me of worth in myself; my study to learn how to act, not to write. I have addressed all my efforts to the shaping of my life: that is my line, my work: I am less a maker of books than anything. I have desired capacity to serve my present and essential needs, not to make thereby a storehouse and treasure for my heirs . . . I would rather be a good cook, if I lacked one. Good God! Madame, how should I hate the commendation of being a clever fellow at writing and a nonentity and a fool in all else! I would rather be a fool both in this and that than have made so poor a choice of a function for my abilities.'[1]

*His ideal distinguished from that of Stoics or of Butler.*

What, then, is the kind of life he strives to form? what is Montaigne's ideal of practice? The answer must be Happiness through Virtue; and by Virtue he means no agonizing struggle, but the due recognition and fulfilment of the law of one's being. His conception of 'life according to Nature' differs from that of the Stoics on the one hand, and from that of Bishop Butler on the other. With the Stoics obedience to Nature consisted in placing oneself in harmony with the great scheme of the Universe, the individuality and separate soul of man being overborne by the thought of the cosmos and of universal law. Butler parts from the Stoics

[1] II. xxxvii. p. 170.

in recognizing that man possesses, in his conscious soul and emotions, points which for ever differentiate him from the vast scheme to which the Stoics bid him conform; and Butler's 'Nature' means the mind and spirit of man under the supremacy of Conscience. Now Montaigne, with his strong sense of diversity, fully recognizes the separate individuality which the Stoics ignored; but he lays little stress on Conscience. Self-respect and the mistake of forfeiting it by any deviation from uprightness, this is strong in him: but his creed has nothing painful, sacrificial, self-torturing, about it; and his Christianity, though sincere, is traditional and mechanical rather than personal and intense. And while the Stoics and Butler agree in opposing the 'naturalness' of passion, Montaigne would make more concession than they to the lower nature, would be far less positive in classing any human tendency as of 'lower nature'[1]. He is at one with them, and with Carlyle, in holding that a man must be 'king over his

[1] 'Sommes nous pas bien brutes, de nommer brutale l'operation qui nous faict?' III. v. p. 263.

habitudes'[1]; but such self-government must not be a tyranny of one part over the other—neither in education, nor in life, are body and soul to be disjoined, nor the former offered up in sacrifice to the latter[2]. He disclaims altogether the ascetic ideal, or the cutting oneself off from communion with the world. The *via media* is the safest: it is also the hardest. There is superior difficulty in accepting life as it is, learning to regard its rubs and crosses as burrs thrown upon us in holiday foolery, and

*The Via Media.*

[1] 'Enjoying things which are pleasant; that is not the evil: it is the reducing of our moral self to slavery by them that is. Let a man assert withal that he is king over his habitudes; that he could and would shake them off, on cause shown: this is an excellent law.' *The Hero as Prophet.*

'J'ay des inclinations plus propres et ordinaires, et plus agreables, que d'aultres; mais avecques bien peu d'effort, je m'en destourne, et me coule ayseement à la façon contraire. Un jeune homme doibt troubler ses regles, pour esveiller sa vigueur, la garder de moisir et s'apoltronnir; et n'est train de vie si sot et si debile que celuy qui se conduict par ordonnance et discipline.' *Essais*, III. xiii. p. 475.

[2] 'Ce n'est pas une ame, ce n'est pas un corps, qu'on dresse; c'est un homme: il n'en fault pas les dresser l'un sans l'autre.' I. xxv. p. 132. Cf. II. xvii. p. 34; III. xiii. pp. 500 sqq.

availing ourselves of the alleviations God has provided. What if the hermit-life be only a self-indulgence, a cowardice, a slinking out of the race!

'It is a kinde of death to avoide the paine of well doing or trouble of well living. They [the anchorites] may have another prise, but the prise of difficulty methinks they never had: nor is there any higher reach of difficulty than to hold oneself upright among the surging waves of the world, answering and satisfying loyally all the branches of one's charge. . . . Use within the limits of reason has more sharpness than abstinence hath: and moderation is a virtue much more toilsome than is endurance.'[1]

The principle forbids either a mere seclusion, or a complete slavery to public life and duty. 'The greatest thing of the world is for a man to know how to be his own.'[2] This he cannot be if he is not to some extent others' also; but 'to lose health and the gaiety of life in others' service is a bad and unnatural course'[3]. Philosophy that does not make a man happy is useless: 'the most evident token and apparant signe of true wisdome is a constant and unconstrained rejoycing'[4]; and the Third Book

[1] II. xxxiii (end), p. 121.
[2] I. xxxviii. p. 210.
[3] III. x. p. 396.
[4] I. xxv. p. 128.

closes with a fine exhortation against the refusal of genial and natural pleasures—

> 'It is meere folly; insteade of transforming themselves into angels, they transchange themselves into beastes . . . It is an absolute perfection, and as it were divine, for a man to know how to enjoy his being loyally. . . . Great wrong is offered unto that great and all-puissant Giver, to refuse His gift, and disannul or disfigure the same: He in whom is no evil has made all good.'[1]

*Cf. Prospero.*

This is Montaigne's ideal; a gospel of contentment, of cheerful acceptance, of the golden mean—a life not headstrong or passion-tossed, but self-controlled even in virtue, and ever regardful of the close: a dignified and philosophic attitude in which, I think, we may suppose Shakespeare to have found the model for his Prospero—Gonzalo, one remembers, borrows from the essay 'Des Cannibales'[2]; and there is another passage about a servant of Montaigne's, irreclaimable by threats or entreaty from vagabond habits, who insisted on groping for mussels in a common sink[3], which may have given some suggestion for Caliban.

[1] III. xiii. pp. 508–11. [2] I. xxx. p. 183.
[3] III. xiii. p. 475.

Montaigne's ideal reminds one most, as Sainte-Beuve suggests, of Horace. Proclaimed by one so wise as the Essayist, this abstention from pitching the pipe too high, this refusal to 'spurn as doth a crock against the wall', this recognition of the Maker's intentions in regard to each of us, has been of powerful aid to average humanity, conscious of frailty and needing to be encouraged rather than repelled. But its dangers are obvious. In practice this recognition of the law of one's being is apt to degenerate into a mere search for comfort. It is the negation of effort and enthusiasm: it sets a premium on sloth and self-indulgence. But only by pain and struggle is there any salvation for mortal man; a conviction that has given potency to many of the world's religions, to the mangled corpse of the Egyptian Osiris, to the great renunciation of Buddha, to the cross of Christ. Always this law has been inexorable: man conquers, but only by enduring. Onwards, age after age, moves the slow march of his imperial race; the light of conquest on their faces, their hands ready for the battle, and the shout of a king among them: but

*His gospel of ease negatives heroism.*

every step of that onward progress has been marked by the toil and sweat of conflict; the immortal garland is not won without dust and heat. Now in the quietism, the balanced scale [1], of Montaigne, the whole heroic side of man tends to become ridiculous and disappear. This is faintly visible even in the book. In Book I, writing of Cato the Younger, he says, 'Crawling on the face of the earth, I cease not to mark, even in the clouds, the inimitable height of some heroic souls': but, later [2], there is perhaps something not wholly self-possessed in a death like his, and, elsewhere, a tinge of perversity in martyrs generally.

*Contrast with Shakespeare*

This is the point where Shakespeare parts company with him. The work of Shakespeare's middle period—work like *The Merchant, As You Like It, Henry V*—is full of the practical and happy temper, the fine good-sense, of the *Essais*, of which *The Merchant* in particular shows many reminiscences. But the poet goes on to open to us whole tracts and regions of the human spirit

[1] 'QUE SÇAY JE? Comme je la porte à la devise d'une balance.' II. xii. p. 493. [2] II. xi. pp. 389-90.

that are closed to the great Frenchman, or revealed only in glimpses which rather dazzle him. Almost or quite Shakespeare's equal in the subtleties of character, he has not his intense realization of lofty motive, or of the sweep of great passions; he lacks, in fact, capacity for the tragic side of life. The bitter disillusionment of Troilus, the self-torturing of Hamlet, the agony of Lear—victim, like Laocoon, of two serpent-monsters, the fall of Coriolanus like the crash of some storm-resisting oak, the opening heaven of woman's love and sympathy, the conflict between Will and Fate, the towering schemes, the glorious sacrifices, the whole range of tears and tenderness and pity—these things are beyond Montaigne. Much of the difference is, of course, that of the vehicle: the essay is not the place for great passions. One should note, too, as exceptions, his intense admiration for Socrates and Epaminondas, and the essay (II. xxxv) dedicated to the self-devotion of 'Trois Bonnes Femmes', the wife of a neighbour of Pliny, Arria Paeta, and Seneca's Paulina. But still I think we must recognize that Montaigne's

*represents the comic not the tragic spirit.*

spirit, essentially and in the main, is the comic spirit, with its clear perception, its bright mockery, its imperturbable sense of the mishaps, the ironies, the unimportance of life. And the reason lies mainly in his innate impatience of system, his incapacity for grasp. He sees the detail fully—apprehends the several comedies being played around him, and knows that thousands of similar comedies are enacting elsewhere on this wide, this universal theatre. But he cannot correlate them: he surveys without embracing. In Shakespeare we get an effect of unity, of world-movement behind phenomena, of the universe as one great monologue spoken by God, as He moves the unconscious puppets at His will and gives to each its several tone and gesture. Montaigne abides rather in the feeling of diversity; and that is the comic, not the tragic, sense.

I need not illustrate a sentiment with which his whole work teems, and which has already received delightful illustration in two chapters of *Gaston de Latour*. What is worth our notice is that this sense of diversity, without the corresponding sense

of unity, is the groundwork of the sceptical character. In his essay 'Of Atheism' Bacon says—'while the mind of Man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no farther; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.' Now Montaigne had the fullest sense of the presence of Deity, but it was based on instinct, not on reason, on which he felt it difficult to found any sure belief whatever. For he is not slow to observe that diversity is found, not merely in things, but in human apprehension of them; that, if truth be one, yet human judgement varies so widely with time, with place, with each man's own years, mood, health and circumstances, that nothing is so difficult of attainment as truth. He had voyaged far enough on the ocean of metaphysics to be aware of its innumerable cross-currents. Argument can be found for any and every opinion; and amid a thousand conflicting views, all defensible, everything becomes doubtful. The fortieth essay of the Second Book is devoted to the thesis 'That the taste of Goods

*Sense of diversity leads to scepticism,*

or Evils doth greatly depend on the opinion we have of them', or, as Hamlet puts it, 'There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.'

But the chief expression of this sceptical spirit is the long 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond', the twelfth essay of the Second Book. Here we find the core of Montaigne's thought, his deepest speculation on the limits of human knowledge and the workings of that vast process man did not originate and can in very slight measure control. Strangely enough he is arguing with complete *bona fides* for belief, and seems unaware that what he says makes more strongly for scepticism[1]. De Sebonde, whose work, *Theologia Naturalis*, Montaigne had formerly (1568, published 1569) translated into French, at his father's request[2], had been blamed for seeking arguments for religion in Nature.

[1] The argument is well summarized in the *Michel de Montaigne* 1898 (pp. 144 sqq.) of Mr. M. E. Lowndes, who remarks incidentally 'In this essay may be found embedded almost every one of the sentences upon the ceiling' [i. e. of Montaigne's library: there are fifty-four, and most of them were deciphered by MM. Galy and Lapeyre in 1861 (Bonnefon, i. 238)].

[2] II. xii. pp. 402–3.

Montaigne in his defence urges, firstly, that faith so weak as our quarrels and poor practice show ours to be cannot dispense with rational aid, though such should always be subsidiary; and, secondly, that, if De Sebonde's arguments are weak, so is every other effort of man's reason. Montaigne sees no department of knowledge or speculation where the results can really be relied on, nothing unaffected by our fallibility. Even the recent discoveries of science with their overthrow of ancient notions only led Montaigne to augur that they, too, would be superseded [1].

'Whatsoever is told us, and whatever we learne, we should ever remember . . . it is a mortall hand that presents it, and a mortall hand that receives it. Onely things which come to us from heaven have right and authority of perswasion and markes of truth.' [2]

*but leaves him instinctive faith.*

It never seems to have occurred to him to question that which professed to come from heaven. He did not perceive that in demonstrating human fallibility he was proving far too much; that all his arguments are equally valid against the Christian apologists, if not against Christianity

[1] II. xii. pp. 539–41. [2] *Ib.* p. 531.

itself. His universal doubt, in which he anticipates Descartes, did not lead him to reject or criticize the Christian scheme. Yet there were passages in the *Essais* which elicited the animadversion of the censors at Rome; notably that on the destruction of the classics by religious zeal, which, he says, 'hath done more hurt to learning than all the barbarian flames'[1], and the defence in the same essay of the Emperor Julian. And when we hear him speak of 'the grosse impostures of religion' and own that no fancy is too mad to find support[2]; when we read 'How many things served us but yesterday as articles of faith which today we deeme but fables!'[3]—it is hard to see how a mind so open can have avoided applying to the received faith what he saw to be true of Pagan superstition or of secular knowledge. But the same difficulty might be urged in regard to other thinkers of the sixteenth century, such as Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa. The age of close Biblical criticism was yet far distant, and the

[1] II. xix. beginning. See Lowndes, p. 171.
[2] I. xxii. p. 79. [3] I. xxvi. end.

actual power of the Church over men's lives and fortunes must needs have facilitated acceptance. Nay, the contradiction appears in the far later case of Swift, whose orthodoxy, in spite of *The Tale of a Tub,* is beyond a doubt. The full reach of his satire escaped the Dean, as the full import of his arguments escaped the Essayist; and we may find a better reason for submission than fear or self-interest in either's deep distrust of the human powers. Amply recognizing the vanity of anthropomorphic notions of God, Montaigne saw, too, that only in terms of humanity can He be made known to man[1]. He fell back with relief on an authoritative creed, the possibility of error in which he must have recognized, but for which he found additional argument in its parellelism by other and earlier creeds[2]. And authority once allowed, he will not limit it. His toleration of Luther or the Huguenots does not extend to sympathy; and his tone on religious questions is

*Bows to authority.*

[1] 'Ce sont toutes agitations et esmotions qui ne peuvent loger en Dieu, selon nostre forme; *ny nous l'imaginer selon la sienne.*' II. xii. p. 464.

[2] *Ib.* pp. 541-2.

one of marked deference. In an early essay he says—'Either a man must wholly submit himselfe to the authoritie of an Ecclesiastical policie, or altogether dispence himselfe from it: it is not for us to determine what part of obedience we owe unto it'[1].

*Knowledge limited by senses: are they complete?*

One of his arguments for human fallibility is of special interest to me, perhaps only because I had myself recorded it before reading this essay—the argument that, revelation apart, human knowledge is bounded by the report of the senses, and we have no certainty whatever that the number of the senses is complete[2]. Through five ports or channels

[1] I. xxvi. end, p. 147.

[2] 'Je veois plusieurs animaulx qui vivent une vie entiere et parfaicte, les uns sans la veue, aultres sans l'ouïe: qui sçait si, à nous aussi, il ne manque pas encores un, deux, trois, et plusieurs aultres sens? Car, s'il en manque quelqu'un, nostre discours n'en peult descouvrir le default. C'est le privilege des sens d'estre l'extreme borne de nostre appercevance.' II. xii. p. 557. This interesting speculation was probably suggested to Montaigne by Lucretius' contention (iv. 802–4) that the mind perceives only what it expects or strives to perceive, and all else that is there is lost—'proinde omnia quae sunt | praeterea pereunt, nisi si quae ad se ipse paravit'—and note, further, his denial that the functions actually

we obtain a limited, though widening, outlook on those portions of the universe to which the five senses correspond. Suppose we had thirty—dare we say we should find nothing to correspond to that addition? How much is there, at present unintelligible, that may not be due to the interplay of forces, the presence of factors, unknown and perhaps unknowable by our present faculties! Montaigne bids us observe the obvious inter-communication and intelligence of the animal world: whence is this? Men born blind, he says, sometimes speak of objects in a manner ridiculous to those who can see.

'Who knowes whether mankind commit as great a folly, for want of some sense; and that by this default

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performed by the senses are their final causes (822-57). Lines 478-9 assert the absolute authority of the senses as the source of knowledge; and Montaigne, in the place we are discussing, actually quotes ll. 486-7, 489-90.—I cannot find that his suggestion has received among philosophers, from Descartes onwards, the attention it surely merits. In the long dispute on the origin of our knowledge I find nothing exactly analogous save Berkeley's suggestion, which he offers only to repudiate, of a new sense by which the idea (sensation) of spirit might be received (*Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part III, Secs. 135-6).

the greater part of the visage of things be concealed from us? Who knowes whether the difficulties we find in sundry of Nature's workes proceede thence? And whether diverse effects of beasts, which exceed our capacitie, are produced by the facultie of some sense that we want? And whether some of them have by that meane a fuller and more perfect life then ours? . . . We have by the consultation and concurrence of our five senses formed one Verity, whereas peradventure there was required the accord and consent of eight or ten senses, and their contribution, to attaine a perspicuous insight of her, and see her in her true essence.'[1]

It is a daring speculation; and, so far as any comparison of the animal world with ourselves is concerned, the course we see to have been followed by evolution makes it improbable that they possess any marked and unknown superiority: but, for the rest, who shall say it is unwarranted? Berkeley, with his limitation, not merely of human knowledge but of Existence, by perception, would probably have rejected the notion, spite of his admission that things unperceivable by the human mind may yet 'subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit'[2]. The eighteenth-century thinkers in general were prone to accept man as the measure

[1] II. xii. pp. 558-9.

[2] *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I, sec. 6.

of all things, and preferred to dispute on the nature of the powers we have than to imagine powers we have not. But Montaigne's idea is far from chargeable with their sterility. Let us alter the terms a very little, substitute 'faculties' for 'senses', and ask, not whether man has his full complement, but whether he is yet conscious of all he really possesses. Nothing is more certain than that human faculty has received additions in the past. Out of the use of ear, eye and touch—from a system of signalling among animals, we are told, as regards objects of fear or desire—we long ago developed speech : and it is hardly too much to say that speech gave us reason, so powerful has it proved, especially since the addition of writing, to stimulate the dim gropings of the brain by its mere clear statement and marshalling of results. Can a thought even be said to exist until it has reached definite expression ? Hardly can the eye itself claim to rival the tongue and written word as the instrument of human progress. With an acquisition so splendid in the past, what may we not hope in the future? why should we limit the possible fields of

*Advance of the past, and of the future.*

human experience? Is it not, for instance, more logical to hold with Milton that

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the Earth
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep,

than to oppose an obstinate *a priori* incredulity to the experiments by which even now a group among us are endeavouring to establish our possession of a means of communicating with the absent and the dead?

Vigilance against imposture there must be, of course, and against the fashionable sensationalism which prays to be imposed on: but why reject the possibility? I suspect that much now held matter of faith or of superstition will one day take its place as scientific fact. The supernatural may have no existence, but then the natural has practically no limits. In the latest discoveries it is impossible not to feel some lessening of that gulf between spiritual and material, the idea of which has held us like an obsession. But whether spirit be or be not a mode of matter, there may be modes of existence in Nature much other than any known to us. As the late Mr. Frederick Myers said—

'The universe may be infinite in an infinite number of ways.' Prisoners for ages of the grosser faculties with which we started, we may perhaps look forward to a time when the acquisition of finer faculties will lead to the disuse and shedding of the more elementary, such as touch; until at last the great barrier is broken down, the dreams of philosophers and the ecstasies of saints are found to coincide with the truths of science, and matter becomes one with spirit, knowledge with feeling, Earth with Heaven.

Slight and puny, indeed, can be any present anticipation of such ultimate union and fusion. Speculation and desire far outrun the slow course of Nature, who is wiser than we, and builds to last. *E pur si muove*: and when we learn better to wait her time and heed her methods, to co-operate rather than to constrain, she may quicken her pace. Meantime let us not scorn or hastily prejudge any honest effort to increase our knowledge.

*His tranquil end.*

Montaigne, one cannot but think, must have felt how near this thought of other possible senses lay to that of the spirit-world. It may have helped

him to accept that doctrine of the resurrection of the body which Christianity has added to the Greek faith in the immortality of the soul. It must at least have intensified his constant interest in and absorbed anticipation of the last great change, the opening vision, the rending of the veil. But his closing years seem to have been quite untroubled. Save for some lack of artistic enthusiasm, we might almost attribute to him those dignified words of Landor on his seventy-fifth birthday.

> I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;
> Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art;
> I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

He met death quietly when it came. The account of Pasquier—derived perhaps from the widow, for he was not personally present—represents the Essayist as lying during the last three days speechless, but conscious; as summoning his neighbours and taking quiet leave of them; as hearing mass for the last time, raising himself in bed as best he could at the elevation of the Host,

and falling back, with clasped hands, dead. The other accounts, of Pierre de Brach and Florimond de Raymond, agree as to his tranquillity. That is well. Through life he had striven to prepare himself to meet the king of terrors like a brave man, a philosopher and a Christian: Death enters, and he is able to take his hand without shrinking, and to step with him into 'the great perhaps'.

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